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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: OPPOSITION PLEASED WITH RECENT MEETINGS
WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i.Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d).

11. (C) Summary: The August 7 National Security Council Meeting attended by several opposition leaders, both parliamentary and non-parliamentary, and an August 12 meeting between opposition leaders and the Minister of Internal Affairs to discuss alleged political repression of opposition activists were positively assessed by all sides. Both publicly and privately, opposition leaders and GoG participants described the meetings as constructive and a positive first step. The second meeting was a result of Irakli Alasania's request and was at the very least, a frank and open discussion with law enforcement officials. While mistrust remains, both sides said that the meetings were civil, based on concrete issues and approached in apparent good faith. Minister Merabishvili was described as very constructive and promised to respond to specific allegations of politically motivated arrests raised by opposition leaders, mainly provided by Alasania. Opposition leaders expressed cautious optimism but stressed that only concrete results will truly help build trust between the GoG and opposition leaders. End Summary.

NSC Meeting - A First Step

12. (C) President Saakashvili's invitation to the opposition to join a meeting of the National Security Council was derided by a number of opposition leaders as political propaganda. Nevertheless, Irakli Alasania (Our Georgia-Free Democrats), Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (Freedom Party), Zurab Tkemaladze (Industrialists Party), Akaki Asatiani (Traditionalists), Peter Mamradze (Fair Georgia - the party of former PM Noghaideli), and Bachuki Kardava (National Democratic Party) of the non-parliamentary opposition and MPs Paata Davitaia (We Ourselves), Levan Vepkhvadze (Christian Democrats), and Gia Tortladze (Democratic Party) of the parliamentary opposition accepted the invitation. Alasania told former EUR DAS Bryza that the NSC meeting was positive. Davitaia told Polchief that he was very pleased with the NSC meeting and hoped such cooperation would continue. At the NSC meeting, Alasania requested that another meeting to discuss alleged politically motivated arrests with the MoIA. According to Alasania, Saakashvili immediately agreed to the request -- which Alasania viewed as a positive step.

MoIA Meeting - A Second Step

13. (C) The meeting between MoIA representatives and opposition took place on August 12 at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Non-parliamentary opposition participants included Alasania, Zurab Abashidze (Our Georgia-Free Democrats), David Usupashvili (Republicans), Pikria Chikhradze (New Rights), Tkemaladze, Kardava, and Sandro Bregadze (Freedom Party) while Levan Vepkhvadze (Christian Democratic Movement), Davitaia, and Jondi Baghaturia (Georgian Troupe) represented the parliamentary opposition. Alasania announced after the meeting that the MoIA had agreed

to a 24 hour hotline to inform MoIA officials of politically motivated arrests. Various opposition leaders handed over lists of alleged political arrests to the MoIA which agreed to review the cases and respond within roughly ten days. (Embassy Note: Post has a copy of Alasania's list and will also expand upon it and track cases of alleged politically motivated arrests much like it has tracked incidents of violence as a result of the political protests. Alasania's list is the most inclusive and was prepared from input from Qlist is the most inclusive and was prepared from input from many non-parliamentary leaders then screened and pared down to represent what Alasania thought were the most credible cases of arrests based on political activity. End Note.) Alasania described the two meetings positively saying that "these two steps are steps of goodwill."

¶4. (C) Others were less positive, but positive nonetheless. Chikhradze said that there is hope that "some signs of political stability will be seen in the country." Ombudsman Sozar Subari who also attended the meeting said that the meeting achieved no concrete results but that fact the meeting was held was a positive development. Vepkhvadze said that he did not expect that all the cases given will be recognized as politically motivated arrests, but he hoped the MoIA would admit that most disputed detentions were linked to political activities. Predictably, former Presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze, Eka Beselia (United Georgia), and Koba Davitashvili (People's Party) called the meeting a PR stunt.

¶5. (C) Privately, cautious optimism was the general reaction. Head of the Analytical Unit Shota Utiashvili told Poloff that the meeting was very constructive and that the

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MoIA would respond to the lists that were provided. Utiashvili said that a number of the cases involved very serious charges for which no accommodation could be made. In others, Utiashvili said in cases where discretion is appropriate, the MoIA would push for leniency. Alasania told an EU diplomat (who relayed the message to Poloff) that he was very pleased with the meeting and hoped it would be followed by concrete steps. Alasania said that many in the non-parliamentary opposition were dubious of engaging the government but he viewed continued engagement as essential (septel). He was pleased that a hotline mechanism was established. Alex Petriashvili (Our Georgia-Free Democrats) told Polchief that Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabishvili was engaged and constructive. Petriashvili said that they expected the MoIA to respond as promised and viewed the MoIA's response as a test as to how committed the GoG actually was to dialogue and political reconciliation. Deputy Ombudsman Giorgi Chkheidze told Poloff that the meeting between MoIA and the opposition was a positive, but like Alasania wanted to see concrete results before he made any larger conclusions. LOGSDON